

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN GERBER and ANNA MARIA GERBER

By his son, Moroni Gerber

Dr. John Gerber was born of well-to-do parents on Sept. 8, 1796 in Schangnau, Bern, Switzerland. This was the birthplace and home of his ancestors for many generations.

Dr. Gerber was well educated in the common schools and universities. He was a lover of religion and very spiritual, therefore he trained for the ministry. He was admitted to the local Lutheran College at the age of 20. During the first three years he studied four languages, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and French. His native tongue was German and later, in America, he learned English, making six languages he spoke. While attending this college he studied the theological subjects. Later, he studied medicine in France. Dr. Gerber completed the medical courses with honor and was certified as Doctor of Homeopathics.

On Jan. 13, 1822 he was ordained to the ministry by his most distinguished prelate, Dr. Flatt, of the Protestant Lutheran Church and entered the services of the English Bishopric Missionary Society of London. He completed his studies at the University of Stuttgart and spent the following year in ministerial labors in London. The Society there called him to go to Sierra Leona, West Africa to labor with the Negro Colonies.

Twenty one people sailed on the ship including three women. One of the women was Dr. Gerber's bride, Magdeline Haug. The country was wild and unsettled. On May 22, 1826 Magdeline gave birth to a baby and both died and were buried on Bahama Island.

Shortly after this tragedy, Dr. Gerber returned to London. While there he met Maria Elizabeth Wagner. They were married Oct. 17, 1827. Again, they sailed for Africa. On Dec. 15, 1828, a daughter was born to them and again the mother died in childbirth. The baby lived and was named Maria Susanna Wilhelmena.

Dr. Gerber continued his labors as minister and doctor, also serving as school teacher. On Jan. 8, 1830 he married Johanna Eleanora Sessing at Sierra Leona, West Africa. Ten years of his life were spent in this unhealthy climate and they had most trying times. Finally, after being afflicted with yellow fever, he recovered sufficiently to return to London.

Dr. Gerber told several interesting experiences that he had during his stay in Africa. Among them were narrow escapes from crocodiles, boa-constrictors, and a species of large monkeys. His love of the outdoors and the chase often led him far out into the wilds and consequently into dangerous situations.

One time he was in charge of a small boat to take a quantity of red pepper up the coast to a shipping point. When part way up he saw a French war ship coming toward them. France and England were at war and he knew he would be taken prisoner if caught so he ordered the crew to run close to the shore. The water was too shallow for the large vessel to venture there, but to his dismay he saw the French lowering and manning a large rowboat. He decided to make an effort to save himself and his cargo. He knew of a shallow inlet near by so hurriedly prepared a few pepper bombs, timed to explode immediately after being thrown on deck. As the rowboat pulled near them, they tossed the bombs onto the enemies boat. The bombs exploded as planned. While the French were blinded with the pepper, and near smothering, Dr. Gerber, with his cargo, sailed up the narrow inlet.

In seeking a new field of labor, Dr. Gerber's attention was drawn to the numerous German and Swiss colonial branches in the USA. So he was sent to supervise the Protestant Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches in this country. This assignment was given him by Dr. Blumhardt in 1834. His duty was to travel from group to group and keep the organizations intact. This he did along with his medical practice for the next eight years. During this time four children were born to them. Then on Sept. 12, 1842 his wife and baby, Fredrick, died.

Shortly after this, Dr. Gerber hired Anna Maria Ackeret to take care of his children. A few months later they were married. Though he was 28 years older than she, they were always happy together.

Anna Maria had been born in Switzerland, near Lake Zurich, May 11, 1824. At the age of 6 she and her family came to the United States and settled in Jackson County, Indiana. When Anna Maria was nine years old, she with a twin brother, Hans, were left orphans. Although finances had been left for them, the money was used otherwise, and they suffered poverty and hardships. Therefore, Anna Maria began working at an early age. It was at this time that Dr. Gerber heard of her and hired her to take care of his children.

Dr. Gerber had his father, Johannes, living with him. So with the three children from his previous marriages, there was a family of six. This was a big responsibility for a young bride.

The family made their home in the neighborhood of St. Louis, Mo. It was here that Dr. Gerber first heard the story of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ from Mormon missionaries. He told his wife that at last he had found the truth he was searching for, that he had always felt there was something lacking in their religion. The family, including Johannes, were baptized on August 8, 1852.

For many years the Gerbers had been a highly respected family and were esteemed among the well-to-do citizens of St. Louis. The doctor was successful in his medical profession and a beloved minister as well. Now came a great change. He lost his position as physician and clergyman, their fine home was burned, and they were outcasts, and friendless, except for a few Latter Day Saints living in that section. Even the bills due him could not be collected.

Being thus deprived of all their worldly goods, the family sought the aid of the Church, and were aided in their trek to Utah by the Perpetual Emigration Fund. Years later this debt was completely repaid.

Up to this time, Anna Maria had given birth to five children. Three of them had died and were buried in Missouri.

The journey across the plains was very trying. The grandfather, Johannes, was ill, but had a great desire to live to see the Salt Lake Valley. This wish was granted. As soon as the company came in sight of the Valley, he asked to be helped up from his bed, saying, "So I can see the land of Zion". After taking in the view, he said, "I am satisfied, and I am ready to go." After arriving on Immigration Square that night, he died quietly. It was October of 1854.

The first job offered Dr. Gerber in Utah was harvesting potatoes. This was too much for his pride, and he promptly refused. However, his wife said later that in order to provide for his family, he was glad to pick up potatoes that very fall.

A few days later the family moved south with a company of Saints. They located near Cedar City. Here a son, Moroni, was born on Oct. 4, 1856.

The poverty of the family at that time was extreme. The crickets and grasshoppers had destroyed most of the crops. Someone had stolen the family's cow. Their food consisted mainly of a few vegetables, wild roots, and an occasional rabbit for stew.

During these six years the family moved around in the communities of Southern Utah. Dr. Gerber continued his medical practice but received no fee as the people had nothing to offer.

From there, the family moved to Wasatch County locating in "Upper Settlement", later named Mound City and now known as Midway. Here Dr. Gerber made his first effort to establish a permanent home in Utah. He filed on homestead right of 80 acres, and built a log cabin to which was later added another room.

The winter of 1864 and 1865 was unusually hard. It started snowing late in November before the grain was all threshed. Owing to so much rain and snow falling, it was necessary for the family to move the wheat into one of the log rooms to keep it from spoiling. Here they flailed it out as needed for food. It was prepared chiefly by boiling, some parched and eaten like popcorn. At times a quantity of wheat was slightly browned, then beaten in an iron mortar and made into rough cakes which was relished by all the family.

Much rain and sleet fell and sent streams of water down the walls of the house and through the roof. The only dry spot was near the fire-place where Mother sat with her baby Adelia in her arms. The children often huddled near to keep warm and dry and used an old quilt to stretch over them as a tent during the storm.

Sometime in 1866 or 1867 the people along Snake Creek were asked to move together for better protection from the Indians, who were reported on the warpath. Accordingly the families built their homes around an 8 acre square. The homes faced the center, thus forming a fort. All stock was driven into this square at night and guarded.

In the spring of 1868 the family moved to Salt Lake City and here they fared better than at any time since leaving Missouri. Dr. Gerber practiced medicine and received some pay. In the fall of 1870 they returned to Midway and Dr. Gerber built a two room frame house into which the family moved. Dr. Gerber contracted pneumonia and died about two weeks later, November 22, 1870.

Dr. Gerber was honored and respected as a doctor of medicine. Often, after joining the Church, people were unable to pay him for his services, but he shared his skill as a doctor willingly and well. Someone once said that a book could be written about the good he did as a doctor.

Before his death, he called John Huber to his bedside and bore a strong testimony of the truthfulness of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He requested that this be reported to the News and public. He was buried in the "Upper Settlement Cemetery" on the foothills north-west of Midway. A Pioneer Monument has since been erected by his descendants to his memory.

The family of Dr. Gerber, his wife, Anna Maria, and her three children; lived in the little frame house for the next eight years. Dr. Gerber's wife, Anna Maria, began going out as a midwife in 1873. Her success was remarkable and she was credited with saving many lives. There was no doctor in the area at that time, and her field of labor extended to every settlement in Wasatch County. She was affectionately known as Mother Gerber. Sometimes she faced severe snow storms and blizzards in order to get through to the homes of the sick. At one time when the weather was extremely cold, she brought a new baby into the world. Because of the poverty of the family, there were no clothes for the newcomer. Mother Gerber took off her petticoat and wrapped the infant in it. The following day she visited neighbors and solicited clothes and food for the destitute family.

One night there came a knock on the door. It was an expectant father. "Come quick, Mother Gerber, my wife is having a baby." Then in his excitement he jumped on his buckboard and drove off into the night, leaving Mother Gerber to walk the three miles through the snow alone.

Many times Mother Gerber was called on to administer to sick animals. Once a horse had run a huge splinter into its side and the men sent for Mother Gerber. They roped the horse down, she climbed on top, cut the horse's side open and removed the splinter, and sewed up the wound.

Mother Gerber was sometimes away from home for days or weeks at a time in performing her services to the sick. She received very little cash, but was often paid with produce.

She spent the last years of her life in the homes of her children, Moroni, Ellen, and Adelia. She died February 11, 1912 at Maesar, Uintah County, Utah.

Mother Gerber didn't leave much in the way of materials things to show for her life of service. However, there are several old timers in Wasatch County who still walk straight because of her skill in setting bones with wooder splints and rags and many of the inhabitants of early Provo Valley came into this world to the call of "Mother Gerber, come quick! My wife is having a baby!"

This is from the story of Moroni Gerber, son of Dr. John Gerber and Anna Maria Ackeret Gerber. Moroni Gerber was the father of Stella Gerber Gardner. E. Ray Gardner is the husband of Stella Gerber Gardner.